



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Summary Meeting Minutes  
January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**I. Call to Order & Introductions:** Bill Gray, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Bill asked for all present to please stand for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged in and to remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance. All in attendance gave brief introductions.

**II. Approval of Minutes:** Bill Gray, Chair, made an edit to the draft minutes to correct the Veteran Service Officers (VSO) typo. Pete Esker, Commissioner, motioned for the December Meeting Summary Minutes to be approved with the edit. Rich Fales, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the December Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes will be online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

**III. “Community Heroes” – Marian Merewitz, Montgomery Community Television (MCT)**  
Marian Merewitz has worked with MCT since 1990. MCT is television created by residents for residents. They offer classes to teach residents how to create and produce shows. She is currently on the MCT Board of Directors, along with Jonathan Walker, Sr., Commissioner, and Greg Hamilton, Active Participant. She produces three series, one of which is about people and events in Montgomery County titled “Connecting Our Community”. Marian would like to develop one minute public service announcements (PSA) to run before and after the show that would feature service members, veterans, or their family members. They would be given one minute to talk about what branch in the military they are or were enlisted with and their experiences while in the military. The PSA’s are tentatively titled “Community Heroes.” At the end of the PSA a screen will say “Our Community, Our Heroes. Thank you (name) for keeping our community safe.” It was suggested by Jane McCarthy to change “community” to “nation”. Jonathan suggested incorporating the word “veteran”, if the PSA featured a veteran. Marian would like to feature the different military branch seals as backgrounds, unless they are out on location. She offered to meet with individuals outside of the MCT studios. Jonathan proposed posting this information on the County’s Veterans Affairs website and linking to the program proposal on the Commission’s Facebook and Twitter accounts. He also suggested sending the information out to past speakers. Betsy Luecking, Staff, said she will email the information out via the Veterans Affairs eSubscribe list. Marian offered to have someone talk about the Commission on an episode of “Connecting our Community”. MCT now has streaming video on their website so individuals can view programs online. The PSA’s would also be available online. Marian will also submit the PSA’s to air independently at any time during the week. Individuals that are interested in being highlighted in a PSA may e-mail Marian at [m\\_merewitz@yahoo.com](mailto:m_merewitz@yahoo.com). (Note: there is an underscore between m\_m)

**IV. Maryland National Guard Forums on Veterans Reintegration ~ Jerry Godwin**

Jerry Godwin, Vice-Chair, asked Lorrie Knight-Major, Commissioner, to speak about the forums. It was a two day event that was very well attended. The first day was focused towards educators. One of the speakers was from Cleveland State University, which offers a program called Supportive Education for the Returning Veteran (SERV). The program is designed to assist military veterans with their transition from soldier to civilian to student. John Schupp, Ph.D., Program Director for SERV,

researched trends of veterans in college and hypothesized that veterans who had been in combat were more likely to stay in school if they were surrounded by other veterans versus going to classes with civilians. Dr. Schupp noted that 3% of veterans who start college actually finish and obtain a degree. For veterans who participated in the SERV program, their completion rate is 75% to 85%. Veterans have trouble with environmental distractions, such as worrying about someone entering the classroom and making sure their classmates are safe. Male veterans were more likely to participate in the SERV program than female veterans. It is difficult to get these types of programs into colleges as they do not see the benefit. Veterans bring money into the community as their tuition is paid by the GI Bill and does not detract from State grants. The second day of the Summit focused on small business owners and employers trying to get in contact with veterans.

#### **V. Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) Survey ~ Rich Fales, Commissioner**

Rich Fales, Commissioner, spoke about a survey that was recently mailed from the MDVA to all veterans in Maryland for whom they have addresses for. Rich noted that very few people received this letter. He has been in contact with Bob Sharps, MDVA Director, Outreach & Advocacy, about posting on their website an article or link to the Montgomery County Veterans Affairs website. He also asked Mr. Sharps about obtaining a contact list of individuals from Montgomery County. There are an estimated 476,202 veterans in Maryland. Rich is also trying to get hard copies of the survey to be given out to the prisons.

#### **VI. Chair and Vice Chair Report – Bill Gray, Chair, and Jerry Godwin, Vice-Chair**

Jerry Godwin, Vice-Chair, delivered testimony on County hiring practices last Tuesday before the County Council. The proposed employment bill would give a preference to veterans who are rated as having a 30% disability or higher and are placed on the well-qualified list. County Executive Isiah Leggett and Joseph Adler, Director, Office of Human Resources, are in support of the bill. The County Council will vote on the bill before the end of January. Betsy Luecking, Staff, added that certification of disability will be done by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Jerry added that the testimony, as well as past testimonies, is now available on the Commission's website:

[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

Bill Gray, Chair, recently had a meeting with Lorrie Knight-Major, Commissioner, Lisa Reeves, Director, Easter Seals, Alan Bowser, Chief of Staff, Duchy Trachtenberg, and Phil Alperson, Montgomery County BRAC Coordinator. Lisa talked about the possibility of renting space in their building to the VA to house the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). Jane McCarthy, who serves on the Lt. Governor's Veterans Behavioral Health Advisory Board, noted that the Board recently published a report recommending that the CBOC be placed on a military base. She will draft a letter to the County Executive for the Commission's recommendation that the CBOC be placed in Montgomery County and not on a military base. Lorrie Knight-Major and Bill Gray will assist Jane with drafting the letter.

Bill recently spoke to a group of students at Paint Branch High School who are reading the book about a Vietnam infantry platoon titled "The Things They Carried". Pete Esker, Commissioner, suggested adding a Speaker's Bureau section to the Veterans Affairs website.

#### **VII. Project Updates**

None.

#### **VIII. Roundtable**

Betsy thanked Jonathan for sending the Commissioners information on current legislation for veterans and the military that has been introduced at the Maryland General Assembly. She asked if a Commissioner would take the lead in reviewing legislation and sending remarks to the rest of the Commission so that they can advocate for bills as private citizens at the General Assembly. Pete

Esker, Commissioner, volunteered as he works on the National Legislative Commission for the American Legion. Commissioners can now view the latest bills and resolutions on the Veterans Affairs website under the category "Legislation".

Betsy gave an update on the Rockville Memorial Library. A formal dedication is tentatively scheduled around Memorial Day. Chuck Short, Special Assistant to the County Executive, is trying to put together a temporary collection for the library focusing on those missing and killed in action. They are looking for a room or area large enough to hold information on all the wars and feature letters, tapes, and books from family members. Betsy will ask Mr. Short to attend an upcoming meeting to discuss the dedication ceremony.

Betsy asked the Commissioners to review the e-mail she sent out regarding workgroups, and asked them to decide whether they want to have work groups or just have goals that individuals can work on. Initial reaction was to work together on projects as a full Commission with some members taking the lead on designated projects, drafting of testimony, or attending meetings. The legislation creating the Commission is to advise the government on issues of importance to veterans, and commissioner expertise is critical to this effort, but at the same time we are also striving to be mindful of making the best use of your time. It was decided that the group attempt to use conference calls, email, and meeting directly with department heads and agency leaders to accomplish the projects.

**Adjournment:** 8:00 p.m.

Respectively submitted,  
Carly Clem, OSC  
Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison

**Next Full Commission Meeting:** Tuesday, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010, from 6:30pm to 8:00pm at 401 Hungerford Drive, Rockville, MD – 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Tan Conference Room. Parker Hamilton, Director, Montgomery County Public Library System, will come to speak with Commissioners on how best the library system can honor Veterans.